

SINNERS BOUND WITH THE CORDS OF SIN

NO. 915

**A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 13, 1870,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*“His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be held with the cords of his sins.”
Proverbs 5:22.*

THE first part of our text has reference to a net in which birds or beasts are taken. The ungodly man first of all finds sin to be bait; charmed by its apparent pleasantness, he indulges in it; then he becomes entangled in its meshes so that he cannot escape. That which first attracted the sinner, afterwards detains him. Evil habits are soon formed, the soul readily becomes accustomed to evil, and then, even if the man should have lingering thoughts of better things, and form frail resolutions to amend, his iniquities hold him captive like a bird in the fowler's snare. You have seen the foolish fly descend into the sweet which is spread to destroy him; he sips, and sips again, and by-and-by he plunges boldly in to feast himself greedily. When satisfied, he attempts to fly, but the sweet holds him by the feet and clogs his wings; he is a victim, and the more he struggles, the more surely is he held. Even so is it with the sins of ungodly men; they are at first a tempting bait, and afterwards a snare. Having sinned, they become so bewitched with sin that the Scriptural statement is no exaggeration—“Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may you also do good, who are accustomed to do evil.”

The first part of the text also may have reference to an arrest by an officer of the law. The transgressor's own sins shall take him, shall seize him; they bear a warrant for arresting him; they shall judge him; they shall even execute him! Sin, which at first brings to man a specious pleasure, before long turns into bitterness, remorse, and fear; sin is a dragon, with eyes like stars, but it carries a deadly sting in its tail. The cup of sin, with rainbow bubbles on its brim, is black with deep damnation in its dregs. O that men would consider this, and turn from their delusions! To bring torment to the guilty, there is little need that God should literally in the world to come, pile up Tophet with its wood and much smoke, nor even that the pit of hell should be dug for the ungodly in order to make them miserable; sin shall of itself bring forth death. Leave a man in his own sins, and hell itself surrounds him. Only allow a sinner to do what he wills, and to give his lusts unbridled headway, and you have secured him boundless misery; only allow the seething caldron of his corruptions to boil at its own pleasure, and the man must inevitably become a vessel filled with sorrow! Be assured, brothers and sisters, that sin is the root of bitterness; gild the pill as you may, iniquity is death. Sweet is an unholy morsel in the mouth, but it will be wormwood in the heart. Let but man heartily believe this, and surely he will not so readily be led astray. “Surely in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird,” and shall man be more foolish than the fowls of the air? Will he willfully pursue his own destruction? Will he wrong his own soul? Sin, then, becomes first a net to hold the sinner by the force of custom and habit, and afterwards a sheriff's officer to arrest him; and to scourge him with its inevitable results.

The second part of our text speaks of the sinner being held with cords, and a parable may be readily fashioned out of the expression. The lifelong occupation of the ungodly man is to twist ropes of sin; all his sins are as so much twine and cord out of which ropes may be made; his thoughts and his imaginations are so much raw material, and while he thinks of evil, while he contrives transgression, while he lusts after filthiness, while he follows after evil devices, while with head, and hands, and heart he pursues eagerly after mischief, he is still twisting evermore the cords of sin which are afterwards to bind him. The binding meant is that of a culprit pinioned for execution; iniquity pinions a man, disables him from delivering himself from its power; it chains his soul, and inflicts bondage on the spirit far worse than chaining of the body. Sin cripples all desires after holiness, dampens every aspiration after good-

ness, and thus fettering the man hand and foot, delivers him over to the executioner, which executioner shall be the wrath of God, but also sin itself, in the natural consequences which in every case must flow from it. Samson could burst asunder green withes and new ropes, but when at last his darling sin had bound him to his Delilah, that bond he could not snap, though it cost him his eyes. Make a man's will a prisoner, and he is a captive, indeed. Determined independence of spirit walks in freedom in a tyrant's Bastille, and defies a despot's hosts, but a mind enslaved by sin builds its own dungeon, forges its own fetters, and rivets on its chains! It is indeed slavery when the iron enters into the soul; who would not scorn to make himself a slave to his baser passions? And yet the mass of men are such—the cords of their sins bind them!

Thus, having introduced to you the truth of God which this verse teaches, namely, the captivating, enslaving power of sin, I shall advance to our first point of consideration. *This is a solution to a great mystery*; but then, secondly, *it is itself a greater mystery*; and when we have considered these two matters it will be time for us to note what is *the practical conclusion from this line of thought*.

I. First, then, the principle of the text, that iniquity entraps the wicked as in a net, and binds them as with cords is A SOLUTION OF A GREAT MYSTERY.

When you and I first began to do good by telling out the gospel, we labored under the delusion that as soon as our neighbors heard of the blessed way of salvation they would joyfully receive it, and be saved in crowds. We have long ago seen that pleasant delusion dispelled; we find that our position is that of the serpent-charmer with the deaf adder; charm we ever so wisely, men will not hear so as to receive the truth. Like the ardent reformer, we have found out that old Adam is too strong for young Melancthon! We now perceive that for a sinner to receive the gospel involves a work of divine grace that shall change his heart, and renew his nature; none the less is it a great mystery that it should be so. It is one of the prodigies of the god of this world that he makes men love sin, and abide in indifference as if they were fully content to be lost. It is a marvel of marvels that man should be as base as to reject Christ, and abide in willful and wicked unbelief. I will try and set forth this mystery in the way in which, I dare say, it has struck many an honest-hearted worker for Jesus Christ.

Is it not a mysterious thing that men should be content to abide in a state of imminent peril? Every unconverted man is already condemned! Our Lord has said it—"He who believes not is condemned already, because he has not believed on the Son of God." Every unregenerate man is not only liable to the wrath of God in the future, but the wrath of God abides on him; it is on him now, it will always remain upon him; as long as he is what he is, it abides on him; and yet in this state men are *not* frightened, they are *not* amazed or alarmed, they are *not* even anxious! Sunday after Sunday they are reminded of their unhappy position; it makes us unhappy to think they should be in such a state, but they are strangely at ease. The sword of vengeance hangs over them by a single hair, yet they sit at their banquets, and they laugh and sport as though there were no God, no wrath to come, no certainty of appearing before the judgment seat of Christ! See a number of persons in a train that has broken down; the porter has only to intimate that another train is approaching, and that it may perhaps dash into the carriages, and mangle the passengers; he has only to give half a hint, and see how the carriage doors fly open, how the travelers rush up the embankment, each one so eager for his own preservation as to forget his fellow's! Yet here are men and women by the hundreds and thousands, with the fast-rushing train of divine vengeance close behind them! They may almost hear the sound of its thundering wheels, and lo, they sit in all quietness, exposed to present peril, and in danger of a speedy and overwhelming destruction! "It is strange; it is passing strange, it is amazing." Here is a mystery, indeed, that can only be understood in the light of the fact that these foolish beings are taken by their sins, and bound by the cords of their iniquities.

Be it ever remembered that before very long these unconverted men and women, many of whom are present this morning, will be in a state whose wretchedness it is not possible for language fully to express! Within 24 hours their spirits may be summoned before the bar of God; and according to this Book, which partially uplifts the veil of the future, the very least punishment that can fall upon an unconverted soul will cause it "weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth." All they had endured, of whom it is written that they wept, and gnashed their teeth, was to *be shut out into outer darkness*; noth-

ing more! No stripes had then fallen; they had not yet been shut up in the prison of hell; only the gate of heaven was shut; only the light of glory was hid; and straightway there was weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth! What, then, will be the woe of the lost when *positive punishment* is inflicted? As for what they will endure who have heard the gospel, but have willfully rejected it, we have some faint notion from the Master's words—"It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for them." We know that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, for "our God is a consuming fire." From this platform there rings full often that question, "How shall you escape if you neglect so great salvation?" And yet for all this, men are willing to pass on through time into eternity regardless of the escape which God provides, turning aside from the only salvation which can rescue them from enduring "the blackness of darkness forever"! O reason, have you utterly fled? Is every sinner altogether brutish? If we should meet with a man condemned to die, and tell him that pardon was to be had, would he hear us with indifference? Would he abide in the condemned cell, and use no means for obtaining the benefit of life and liberty? Yes, there awaits the sinner a more awful doom, and a more terrible sentence; and we are sent to publish a sure pardon from the God of heaven! And yet thousands upon thousands give us no deep heartfelt attention, but turn aside, and perish in their sins! O that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep for the folly of the race to which I belong, and mourn over the destruction of my fellow men!

It often strikes us with wonder that men do not receive the gospel of Jesus Christ, when we remember that the gospel is so plain; if it were a great mystery, one might excuse the illiterate from attending to it; if the plan of salvation could only be discovered by the attentive perusal of a long series of volumes, and if it required a classical training, and a thorough education, why then the multitude of the poor and needy, whose time is taken up with earning their bread, might have some excuse! But there is under heaven no truth of God plainer than this, "He who believes on the Lord Jesus has everlasting life." "He who believes and is baptized, shall be saved." *To believe*—that is, simply to trust Christ. How plain! There is no road, though it ran straight as an arrow that can be plainer than this! Legible only by the light they give, but all so legible that he who runs may read, stand these soul-quickenings words, "BELIEVE AND LIVE." Trust Christ, and your sins are forgiven; you are saved! This is so plain a precept, that I may call it a very A B C for *infants*, yet *men* receive it not; are they not indeed held by the cords of their sins when they refuse to obey?

Moreover, brothers and sisters, there is a wonderful attractiveness in the gospel. If the gospel could possibly be a revelation of horrors piled on horrors; if there were something in it utterly inconsistent with reason, or something that shocked all the sensitive affections of our better part; we might excuse mankind. But the gospel is just this: man is lost, but God becomes man to save him; "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Out of infinite love to His enemies, the Son of God took upon Himself human flesh that He might suffer in the place of men what they ought to have suffered. The doctrine of substitution, while it wondrously magnifies the grace of God, and satisfies the justice of God, I think ought to strike you all with love because of the unselfish affection which it reveals on Jesus Christ's part. O King of Glory, do You bleed for *me*? O Prince of Life, can You lie shrouded in the grave for *me*? Does God stoop from His glory to be spat upon by sinful lips; does He stoop from the splendor of heaven to be "despised and rejected of men," that men may be saved? Why, it ought to win every human ear; it ought to enter every human heart! Was ever love like this? Go to your poets, and see if they have ever imagined anything nobler than the love of Christ, the Son of God, for the dying sons of men! Go to your philosophers, and see if in all their maxims they have ever taught a more divine philosophy than that of Christ's life, or ever imagined in their pictures of what men ought to be, a heroic love like that which Christ in very deed displayed! We lift before you no bloody banner that might sicken your hearts; we bring before you no rattling chains of a tyrant's domination, but we lift up Jesus crucified, and "Love" is written on the banner that is waved in the forefront of our hosts! We bid you yield to the gentle sway of love, and not to the tyranny of terror! Alas, men must surely be bound, and fettered fast by an accursed love to sin, or else the divine attractions of a crucified Redeemer would win their hearts!

Consider, my friends, you who love the souls of your fellow men, how amazing it is that men refuse to receive the gospel when the commandment of the gospel is not burdensome! I think if it had been written that no man should enter heaven except by the way of martyrdom, it had been wisdom for every one of us to give our bodies to be burned, or to be stretched upon the rack; yes, if there had been no path to escape from the wrath of God but to be flayed alive with Bartholomew, enduring present but exquisite torture, it would have been but a cheap price for an escape from God's wrath, and an entrance into heaven! But I find in God's word, prescribed as the way of salvation, no such physical agonies; no austerities are commanded; not even the milder law which governed the Pharisee when he "fasted thrice in the week"; only this is written: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." And the precept of the Christian's life is, "Love your God with all your heart, and your neighbor as yourself." Most pleasant duties, these of love! What more sweet? What more delightful than to permit the soul to flow out in streams of affection? The ways of true religion are not irksome; her ways are pleasantness, and all her paths are peace! What? Heaven given for *believing*? What? Heaven's gate opened only for *knocking*, and gifts all priceless bestowed for nothing but the *asking*? Yet they will not ask; they will not knock; alas, my God, what creatures are men! Alas, O sin, what monsters have you made mankind, that they will forget their own interests, and wrong their own souls!

Further, it is clear that men must be fast held by the bondage of their sins when we remember that according to the confession of most of them, the pleasures of sin are by no means great. I have heard them say that they have not been satisfied after a short season of indulgence; we know how true the Word is, "Who has woe? Who has redness of eyes? They who tarry long at the wine, those who go in search of mixed wine." No form of sin has ever been discovered yet that has yielded satisfaction. You shall look at those who have had all that heart could wish, and have without restraint indulged their passions; and you shall find them to be in their latter end among the most wretched, rather than the most satisfied of mankind! Yet for these pleasures; I think I degrade the word when I call them "pleasures," for these pleasures they are willing to pawn their souls, and risk everlasting woe! And all this while, be it remembered; to add to the wonder—there are pleasures to be found in godliness; and they do not deny this, they cannot without belying their own observation. We who are at least as honest as they are, bear our testimony that we never knew what true happiness was till we gave our hearts to Christ! And since then our peace has been like a river; we have had our afflictions; we have suffered grievous bodily pain; we have endured mental depression; we have been heavily burdened; we have borne many trials, but we can say—

*"We would not change our blessed estate
For all the world calls good or great."*

"Happy are the people whose God is the Lord!" We can set our seal to this experimentally! See then, my brothers and sisters, these poor souls will prefer the pleasures that mock them, to the pleasures that alone can satisfy. If we had to die like dogs, it would be worth while to be a Christian; if there were no hereafter, and our only consideration were who should enjoy this life the best, it would be the wisest thing to be a servant of God, and a soldier of the cross! I say not it would ensure our being rich; I say not it would ensure our being respected; I say not it would ensure our walking smoothly, and free from outward trouble, but I do say that because of "the secret something which sweetens all"; because of the profound serenity which true religion brings, the Christian life out-masters every other, and there is nothing to be compared with it! But think for a while what the ungodly man's life is! I can only compare it to that famous diabolical invention of the Inquisition of ancient times. They had as a fatal punishment for heretics, what they called the "Virgin's Kiss." There stood in a long corridor the image of the Virgin. She outstretched her arms to receive her heretic child. She looked fair, and her dress was adorned with gold and tinsel, but as soon as the poor victim came into her arms, the machinery within began to work, and the arms closed, and pressed the wretch closer and closer to her bosom, which was set with knives, daggers, lancets, and razors, and everything that could cut and tear him, till he was ground to pieces in the horrible embrace! And such is the ungodly man's life; it stands like a fair virgin, and with bewitching smiles it seems to say, "Come to my bosom, no place as warm and blissful as this." And then as soon

as it begins to fold its arms of habit about the sinner, and he sins again and again, it brings misery into his body. Perhaps if he falls into some form of sin, it stings his soul, makes his thoughts a case of knives to torture him, and grinds him to powder beneath the force of his own iniquities. Men perceive this, and dare not deny it; and yet into this virgin's bosom they still thrust themselves, and reap the deep damnation that iniquity must everywhere involve. Alas, alas, my God!

And now once more. This terrible mystery, which is only solved by men's being held by their sins, has this added to it—that all the while in the case of most of you now present, all that I have said is believed, and a great deal of it is felt! I mean this; if I were talking with persons who did not believe they had a soul, or believe in the Judgment to come, or believe in the penalty of sin, or believe in the reward of righteousness, I could see some reason why they rejected the great salvation; but the most of you who attend this house of prayer—I think I might say *all* have scarcely ever had a doubt about these things. You would be very much horrified if any one would insinuate that you did not believe the Bible to be the Word of God. You have a *little* Phariseism in your soul, that you think you are not as scoffers are, nor infidels. I acknowledge you are not, but I grieve to say I think you are more inconsistent than they! If these things are a fiction, well, sirs, your course is rational; but if these things are realities, what shall I say for you when I plead with God on your behalf? What excuse can I make for you? If you *profess* to believe these things, *act* as though you believe them, yet do not, practically act so—why do you profess to acknowledge them as the truth? The case is worse, for you not only believe these things to be true, but some of you have felt their power! You have gone home from this place, and you could not help it, you have sought your chamber, and bowed your knees in prayer—such prayer as it was, for, alas, your goodness has been like the morning cloud, and the early dew. I know some of you who have had to break off some of your sins, for your conscience would not let you rest in them. Yet you are unbelievers still! You are still undecided, still unsaved, and at this moment, if your soul were required of you, nothing would be in prospect but a fearful looking for Judgment and of fiery indignation! O my hearer, you whose conscience has been at times awakened, in whom the arrows of the great King have found a lodging place, in whom they are rankling still—yield, I pray you, yield to the divine thrusts, and give up your contrite spirit to your Redeemer's hands! But if you do not, what shall I say to you? The kingdom of God has been thrust from you by yourselves. Be sure of this—it has come near you, and in coming near it has involved solemn responsibilities which I pray you may not have to feel the weight of in the world to come.

Here, then, stands the riddle, that man is so set against God and His Christ that he will never accept eternal salvation until the Holy Spirit, by a supernatural work, overcomes his will, and turns the current of his affections! And why is this? The answer lies in the text—because his own iniquities have taken him, and he is held with the cords of his sin. For this reason he will not come to Christ that he may have life. For this reason he *cannot* come, unless the Father which has sent Christ draws him.

II. But now, secondly, I pass on to observe that though this is the solution of one mystery, IT IS IN ITSELF A GREATER MYSTERY.

It is a terrible mystery that man should be so great a fool, so mad a creature as to be held by cords apparently so feeble as the cords of his own sins. To be bound by reason is honorable; to be held by compulsion, if you cannot resist it, is at least not discreditable; but to be held simply by sin, by *sin* and nothing else, is a bondage which is disgraceful to the human name! It lowers man to the last degree, to think that he should need no fetter to hold him but the fetter of his own evil lusts and desires! Let us just think of one or two cords, and you will see this.

One reason why men receive not Christ, and are not saved is because they are hampered by the sin of forgetting God. Think of that for a minute. Men forget God altogether. The commission of many a sin has been prevented by the presence of a child; in the presence of a fellow creature, ordinarily a man will feel himself under some degree of restraint, yet those eyes which never sleep, the eyes of the Eternal God, exercise no restraint on most men! If there were a child in that chamber, you would respect it—but God being there you can sin with impunity! If your mother or your father were there, you would not dare offend—but God who made you, and whose will can crush you; your lawful sovereign, you take no

more account of Him than though He were a dog! Yes, not as much as that. Oh, strange thing that men should thus act, and yet with many it is not because of the difficulty of thinking of God. Men of study, for instance, if they are considering the works of God, must be led up to thoughts of God; Galen was converted from being an atheist while in the process of dissecting the human body; he could not but see the finger of God in the nerves and sinews, and all the rest of the wonderful embroidery of the human frame. There is not an ant or an animalcule beneath the microscope but what as plainly as tongue can speak, says, "Mortal, think of God who made you and me." Some men travel daily over scenes that naturally suggest the Creator. They go down to the sea in ships, and do business on great waters where they must see the works of the Lord. And yet they manage to become the most boisterous blasphemers against the sacred majesty of the Most High in His very temple where everything speaks of His glory! But you will tell me, perhaps, some of you that you are not engaged in such pursuits; I reply, I know it. Many of you have to labor with your hands for your daily bread, in occupations requiring but little mental exercise; so much the guiltier, then, are you that when your mind is not necessarily taken up with other things, you still divert it from all thoughts of God! The working man often finds it is very possible to spend his leisure hours in politics, and to amuse his working hours by meditating upon schemes more or less rational concerning the government of his country; and will he dare to tell me, therefore, that he could not during that time think of God? There is an aversion to God in your heart, my brother, or else it would not be that from Monday morning to Saturday night you forget Him altogether! Even when sitting here you find it by no means a pleasant thing to be reminded of your God, and yet if I brought up the recollection of your mother, perhaps in heaven, the topic would not be displeasing to you at all! What do you owe to your mother compared with what you owe to your God? If I spoke to you of some dear friend who has assisted you in times of distress, you would be pleased that I had touched upon such a chord; and may I not talk with you concerning your God, and ask you why do you forget Him? Have you good thoughts for all but the best? Have you kind thoughts of gratitude for every friend but the best friend that man can have? My God! My God! Why do men treat You like this? Brightest, fairest, best, kindest, and most tender, and yet forgotten by the objects of Your care!

If men were far away from God, and it were a topic abstruse and altogether beyond reach, something might be said; but imagine a fish that despised the ocean and yet lived in it! Imagine a man who should be unconscious of the air he breathes! "In Him we live and move, and have our being; we are also His offspring." He sends the frost, and He will send the spring; He sends the seed-time, and the harvest, and every shower that drops with plenty comes from Him, and every wind that blows with health speeds forth from His mouth! Why, then, is He to be forgotten when everything reminds you of Him? This is a sin! A cruel sin, a cursed sin! A SIN, indeed, that binds men hard and fast, that they will not come to Christ that they may have life! It is strange, it is beyond all miracles a miracle, that such a folly as this should hold men from coming to Christ!

Another sin binds all unregenerate hearts. It is the sin of not loving the Christ of God. I am not about to charge any person here with such sins as adultery, or theft, or blasphemy; but I will venture to say that this is a sin masterly and gigantic, which towers as high as any other; the sin of not loving the Christ of God! Think a minute. Here is one who came into the world out of pure love, for no motive but divine mercy; He had nothing to gain; though He were rich, yet for our sakes He became poor! Why, then, is He not loved? The other day there rode through these streets a true hero, a brave bold man who set his country free, and I do remember how I heard your shouts in yonder street, and you thronged to look into the lion-like face of Italy's liberator! I blame you not; I longed to do the same myself—he well deserved your shouts, and your loudest praises. But what had he done compared with what the Christ of God has done in actually laying down His life to redeem men from bondage, yielding up Himself to the accursed death of the cross that man might be saved through Him? Where are your acclamations, sirs, for this greater hero? Where are the laurels that you cast at His feet? Is it nothing to you; is it nothing to you, all you who pass by; is it nothing to you that Jesus should die? Such a character, so inexpressibly lovely, and yet despised! Such a salvation, so inexpressibly precious, and yet rejected! Oh, mystery of iniquity!

Indeed, the depths of sin are almost as fathomless as the depths of God and the transgressions of the wicked all but as infinite in infamy as God is infinite in love.

I might also speak of sins against the Holy Spirit that men commit, in that they live and even die without reverential thoughts of Him or care about Him. But I shall speak of one sin, and that is the mystery that men should be held by the sin of neglecting their souls! You meet with a person who neglects his body; you call him a fool if, knowing that there is a disease, he will not seek a remedy; if suffering from some fatal malady, he never attempts to find a cure—you think the man is fit only for a lunatic asylum. But a person who neglects his *soul*, he is but one of so numerous a class that we overlook the madness! Your body will soon die; it is but as it were the garment of yourself, and will be worn out, but you yourself are better than your body as a man is better than the clothes he wears. Why spend you, then, all thoughts about this present life, and give none to the life to come?

It has long been a mystery who was the man in the iron mask. We believe that the mystery was solved some years ago by the conjecture that he was the twin brother of Louis XIV, King of France. He was fearful lest he might have his throne disturbed by his twin brother, whose features were extremely like his own; so he encased his face in a mask of iron, and shut him up in the Bastille for life. Your body and your soul are twin brothers. Your body, as though it were jealous of your soul, encases it as in an iron mask of spiritual ignorance—lest its true lineaments, its immortal lineage should be discovered, and shuts it up within the Bastille of sin, lest getting liberty and discovering its royalty, it should win the mastery over the baser nature! But what a wretch was that Louis XIV, to do such a thing to his own brother! How brutal, how worse than the beasts that perish! But, sirs, what are you if you do thus to your own soul, merely that your body may be satisfied, and your earthly nature may have a present gratification? O sirs, be not so unkind, so cruel to yourselves; this sin of living for the mouth, and living for the eyes; this sin of living for what you shall eat, and what you shall drink, and how you shall be clothed; this sin of living by the clock within the narrow limits of the time that ticks by the pendulum; this sin of living as if this earth were all, and there were nothing beyond—this is the sin that holds this City of London, and holds the world, and binds it like a martyr to the stake to perish unless it is set free!

Generally, however, there also lies some distinct form of actual sin at the bottom of most men's impenitence. I will not attempt to make a guess, my dear hearer, as to what it may be that keeps you from Christ; but without difficulty I could, I think, state what these sins generally are. Some men would wish to be saved, but they would not like to take up the cross, and be despised as Christians. Some would like to follow Christ, but they will not give up their self-righteous pride; they want to have a part of the glory of salvation. Some men have a temper which they do not intend to try to restrain; others have a secret sin, too sweet for them to give up; it is like a right arm, and they cannot come to the cutting of it off. Some enjoy company which is attractive, but destructive, and from that company they cannot flee. Men, one way or another, are held fast like birds with birdlime till the fowler comes and takes them to their destruction! O that they were wise, for then they might be awakened out of this folly! But this still remains the mystery of mysteries—that those sins, absurd and deadly, bind men as with cords, and hold them fast like a bull in a net.

THE CONCLUSION OF THE WHOLE MATTER IS THIS—a message, sinner, to you; and believer, to you, too.

Sinner, to you, first; you are held fast by your sins, and I fear much you will be held so till you perish, perish everlastingly! Man, Woman, does not this concern you? I lay last night by the hours together on my bed awake, tossing with a burden on my heart, and I tell you the only burden that I had was your soul! I cannot endure it, that you should be cast into the "lake that burns with fire and brimstone." I believe the Bible as you do; believing it, I am alarmed at the prospect which awaits the unconverted. The more I look into the subject of the world to come, the more I am impressed that all those who would lessen our ideas of the judgment that God will bring upon the wicked are waging war against God Himself! They are warring against virtue, and the best interests of men. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Do not try it, my friend; I pray you, do not try it! Run not this risk, this certainty of endless misery! I beseech you, dare it not! What? Do you say, "What then, should I do?" I ven-

ture to reply in the words of one of old, “Break off your sins by righteousness, for it is time to seek the Lord.” Do you reply, “How can I break them off? They are like cords and bonds!” Ah, soul, here is another part of your misery, that you have destroyed yourself! But you cannot *save* yourself! You have woven the net; you have made it fast and firm; but you cannot tear it in pieces. But there is One who can! There is One upon whom the Spirit of the Lord descended that He might loosen the prisoner! There is a heart that feels for you in heaven, and there is One mighty to save, who can rescue you! Breathe that prayer, “O set me free, Liberator of captive souls.” Breathe the prayer now, and believe that He can deliver you, and you shall yet, captive as you are, go free! And this shall be your ransom price—His precious blood! And this shall be the privilege of your ransomed life—to love and praise Him who has redeemed you from going down into the pit of hell!

But I said the conclusion of the whole matter had something to do with the child of God; it has this to do with him. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, by the love you bear to your fellow sinners, never help to make the bonds of their sins stronger than they are; you will do so if you are inconsistent. They will say, “Why, such a one professes to be a saved man, and yet look how he lives!” Will you make excuses for sinners? It was said of Judah, by the prophet, that she had become a comfort to Sodom and Gomorrah. O never do this! Never let the ungodly say, “There is nothing in it; it is all a lie; it is all a mere pretense; we may as well continue in sin, for look how these Christians act!” No, brothers and sisters, they have bonds enough without your tightening them or adding to them.

In the next place, never cease to warn sinners; do not stand by and see them die without lifting up a warning note! A house is on fire, and you see it as you go to your morning’s labor, and yet never lift up the cry of “Fire!”? A man is perishing and yet no tears for him? Can it be so? At the foot of Mr. Richard Knill’s likeness I notice these words, “Brethren, the heathen are perishing; will you let them perish?” I would like to have each of you apply to your own conscience the question, “Sinners are perishing; will you let them perish without giving them at least a warning of what the result of sin must be?” My brothers and sisters, I earnestly entreat you who know the gospel to tell it to others! It is God’s way of cutting the bonds which confine men’s souls; be instant in season, and out of season in publishing the good news of liberty to the captives through the redeeming Christ!

And lastly, as you and I cannot set these captives free, let us look to Him who can! O let our prayers go up, and let our tears drop down for sinners! Let it come to an agony, for I am persuaded we shall never get much from God by way of conversion till we feel we must have it; until our soul breaks for the longing that it has for the salvation of souls! When your cry is like that of Rachel, “Give me children or I die!” you shall not long be spiritually barren; when you must have converts or your heart will break, God will hear you and send you an answer. The Lord bless you! May none of you be held by the cords of your sins, but may you be bound with cords to the horns of God’s altar as a happy and willing sacrifice to Him who loved you! The Lord bless you for Jesus’ sake.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PROVERBS 3.

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